

Mentor eyes high-tech time keeping system

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The city of Mentor administration is looking at its payroll system in ongoing efforts to streamline and save.

Department heads recently met with a vendor for details on how the city could benefit from automating its paper-based time-keeping system.

"We're just exposing ourselves to a better way to manage our time and payroll," City Manager Ken Filipiak said. "A lot of cities and public sector agencies use it. It certainly would easily pay for itself over a few years and, more importantly, it's a performance tool to ensure that our employees not only are at their jobs when they should be, but also that we're not losing dollars or time."

Officials are considering high-powered time-tracking software from Kronos, based in Chelmsford, Mass., at a cost of about \$500,000. It would replace a time-consuming system that is about half automated now and goes through three or four sets of hands before becoming a paycheck. It also would provide better checks and balances by potentially using a sophisticated fingerprint system for "punching" in and out, Filipiak said.

As it is, the city employs three staff dedicated to payroll duties, and supervisors and managers all spend a "significant" amount of time collecting and approving the timesheets before getting them to the finance department every two weeks, Finance Director David Malinowski said. He added that the city has been **intent** on going with a fully automated system for several months and that it is not the result of discovering impropriety.

"It's not that the current system is broken and not working, but we would like to automate it and bring it into the 21st century," he said. "We'll weigh cost versus benefits with the current system."

City Council would have to approve the investment.

Data collection methods could vary among different groups, such as part-time and full-time staff and salary-exempt employees. In addition to a fingerprint time entry system, options include tracking how long someone is logged onto a computer or is using a mobile device, such as a smartphone.

"Even small errors that accrue over time can mean a lot of lost dollars and a lot of lost time that can be potentially recaptured and put back into serving the community," Filipiak said. "Hopefully, over time, it can mean consolidation. ..."

"It's much better for me to have a police sergeant spend a few more hours on the road patrolling the city than working on payroll functions."

The recreation department also could see a big difference, Director Bob Martin said.

"Picture us in the summer when we have about 500 seasonal employees," he said. "(Now payroll) involves a lot of steps and a lot of time."

The automated system also would assist with meeting Fair Labor Standards Act requirements, involving overtime pay and a large amount of manual labor, Malinowski said.

Other entities using Kronos include Dayton, Canton, Cuyahoga County, the state of Ohio and Montgomery County, Filipiak said. He now awaits feedback from department heads for further evaluation.